INTERVIEWEE: PAUL C. WARNKE (TAPE #3)

INTERVIEWER: DOROTHY PIERCE

January 17, 1969

P: Mr. Warnke, we had left off in our last interview discussing deployment of ABM systems. I want to continue and conclude our interview today, which is Friday, January 17. We're in your offices. It is around quarter-of-four in the afternoon. I'd like to ask you about your views regarding our national security and international security affairs relating to the Nonproliferation Treaty.

W: Well, obviously, the Nonproliferation Treaty is very much in our interests. Now, I don't think that it's a substitute for some type of agreement with the Russians over the control of strategic weapons. I don't really think that it provides you with an insurance policy against proliferation. What you can say for it is that it's about the best you can do under the circumstances.

Now, obviously, any treaty is just as good as the will of its adherents to live up to it, and I think that you would have to anticipate that pressures could develop in various parts of the world that could lead to repudiation of the treaty by the countries affected. The great advantage of the NPT is, in my opinion, that it takes political pressure off such contries as the Federal Republic of Germany to acquire a nuclear capacity. They can point to the Nonproliferation Treaty. They can point to the fact that it does contain some guarantees insofar as the nuclear powers are concerned. Therefore, they can avoid doing something which might be regarded by them as undesirable, but might prove to be

politically necessary in the absence of an NPT.

I think, similarly, countries such as India, which again would be one of the threshold countries, can rely on the NPT as eliminating a political push to do something which the leaders of the country might want to resist. The same perhaps to a lesser degree would be true of Japan because, of course, the political pressures would take longer to build up because of the Japanese aversion to all things nuclear. So that the NPT, it does seem to me, will have the effect of deterring the entry of other countries into the nuclear field. Now, that's only one step in eliminating the danger that nuclear weapons pose, not only to us but to the rest of the world.

P: Of course, we have China to consider at this point, too.

W: You have to consider China, but fortunately the Chinese are still several years away from having a deliverable nuclear weapon. Not only that, but we have the capacity at the present time to develop and deploy an ABM system which would put them several more years away from any capacity to strike us with nuclear weapons. What you have to hope is that time wounds all heels and, as a consequence, the Communist Chinese may acquire a degree of political maturity which would make them more willing to enter into such things as an NPT. That's all you can do, really. In international security, all you can do is live from year to year. But consider the alternative.

P: Mr. Warnke, what do you see as our future pressure points in the world?

W: Well, a major one, of course, at the present time is the Middle East. I say the Middle East because, although there are a lot of other areas which are of tremendous importance to the people of that area, the

Middle East is the potential cockpit for the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States. Now certainly as far as the Biafrans are concerned, they're much more concerned about the Nigerian civil war than they are about the Middle East. But from our standpoint, and from the standpoint of third countries and non-participants in present combat, the Middle East has to rank easily first on the scale.

As far as Southeast Asia is concerned, that's really sort of eliminated as a source of potential confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States. Instead of that, it's an area in which the Soviet Union and the United States, probably, in the long run will develop a common interest. But whatever we are doing there now will not bring in the Soviet Union. Whatever the Soviet Union is doing there now will not provoke us into an extension of that war. So in terms of the overall threat, and the basic threat, the ultimate threat--that of a confrontation between the Soviets and ourselves--Southeast Asia has now been canceled out.

As far as Europe is concerned, that would have to rank number two, because I think we said the other day that although the United States has to recognize the geographic facts of life and cannot intervene effectively in either Czechoslovakia or perhaps in Romania, there are points beyond which the Soviets could not push without bringing about a confrontation. I think, however, that Europe is more within the control of the great powers than the Middle East is. We know the limits of permissible activity in Europe. We know, for example, that were we now to try and free the captive nations that, obviously, the Soviets could not stand for it. You don't hear anybody anymore talking about Latvia, Estonia,

and Lithuania. On the other hand, although the Soviets make occasional threatening gestures towards the Federal Republic of Germany, I think there's no realistic expectation that they would push to a point at which the NATO guarantee would be called into play. We know what the ground rules are pretty much in Europe. They know what we will stand; we know what they will stand.

In the Middle East, however, we don't have the ground rules established, or sufficient control over that which the indigenous people do, to avoid this ultimate risk of confrontation. That's why that is potentially the most incendiary issue that we've got.

As far as other pressure points go, it's pretty hard for me to identify any that I regard as being terribly serious. Again, they're serious for the people of the area, but they're not really serious for American security. They could become so, but under the present circumstances they are not. The traditional enmity of the Moslem and the Hindu, for example, doesn't really pose any immediate risk to our security. The chances are that if you had a confrontation between India or Pakistan at the present time both the Russians and we would want to see it end. That's what happened in 1965 in Tashkent, and I think it would happen now.

I don't think that the Communist Chinese pose any immediate threat to their neighbors on the west. I don't think that they're apt to invade either India or Pakistan. After all, they've worked out quite a satisfactory relationship with Pakistan. And as far as India is concerned, I would think the last thing in the world the Chinese would want would be the job of trying to administer India. It's no more likely than

than India wanting to try and administer China. They've both got troubles enough as it is, and why should they buy more! It would be like somebody with fifteen children going into the adoption business and seeing if they couldn't acquire another fifteen.

So that you don't really have in that part of the world anything of immediate concern to our national security. You do have, of course, a long range threat, and that's that any area like that--teeming as it is with people--represents at a minimum a very poor market for American products. And the long range ability of the United States to maintain our standard of living requires a peaceful and prosperous world, so that we do retain a distinct interest in the area. What I'm talking about is immediate military threats.

As far as Africa and South America are concerned, I remember George Ball, I guess it was, said, "Their problems are impossible, but not serious." And you say that there's a good bit of truth in that. They're not serious from the standpoint of national security interests of an immediate nature. There is no real prospect of widespread war in Latin America. They're not faced with any threat from outside the hemisphere. Certainly the Russians, as I say, recognize that as one ground rule that has been in effect for some time. And they're not about to challenge the Monroe Doctrine.

There is, of course, the threat of Cuba's effort to export revolution, but that's a threat really of internal security within each of the Latin American countries. And even if the worst should happen and some of those countries should, by their own decision, go Communist, it's a situation that we could tolerate with no real risk to our national

security. We again would be faced with the possibility that the Russians might try and exploit that situation, to bring Russian power closer to us the way they did in the Cuban missile crisis, and we would have to respond to that. But if you have just a native Communist state in, for example, Bolivia, it would be a matter of concern to us, but not a matter of security danger.

In Africa, I think that the best you can say is that over a period of time they'll work out their own destiny, but I think that they will have to do it without our military intervention. And they can do it without our being concerned except on humanitarian grounds.

P: Mr. Warnke, do you see our national security geared to the impact and response from the other superpowers, mainly Russia? China is, of course, coming along.

W: Well, I'm not quite clear what your question is. Certainly Russia, by taking an aggressive stance in almost any part of the world, could intimately involve our security interests. If Russia were to try and seek to extend its influence, as I say in Latin America, clearly we'd have to respond and respond immediately and respond strongly. And I don't think that we could look with any equanimity on an effort by the Soviet Union to take over any country in Africa. That sort of external aggression would be something to which we would have to respond. What I'm saying is that there is no indication of that at the present time. There's no indication even that the Soviet Union intends to try and take over any country in the Middle East. I don't think there is any risk that they would try and occupy the UAR or Syria or Iraq, which are the three countries--

P: Their presence is in the Mediterranean very strongly.

W: Yes, but, really, do you have to look with terrible apprehension at the fact that the Russians have got forty-five ships operating in international waters in the Mediterranean. We've had more ships than that operating in international waters in the Mediterranean for a long time, and that particular lake is a lot further from our shores than it is from Russian shores. It's something that we would prefer not to see but you can't regard it as being either unnatural or necessarily evidence of incipient hostility.

Again, Cyprus is the kind of area in which we've got an interest from the standpoint of not wanting to see hostilities break out any place in the world. Also, we've got a unique interest in Cyprus because of the fact that the potential adversaries are both members of NATO, and it would certainly not do much for the eastern flanks of NATO to have Greece and Turkey fight one another, particularly since they would utilize American military equipment in that combat. But if you look at it in terms of immediate impact on our national security, you'd have to rank it behind, I think, the Middle East because it's not an area in which the Russians would have really any great chance of either immediate exploitation or immediate involvement. I can't see Russia coming in in any sort of a Cyprus dispute on the side of either Greece or Turkey.

P: I'd like to shift from this area and ask you what your assessment is of the relations of the Defense Department with Congress, and whether it has hurt, helped, hindered, our progress either in national security or international security affairs.

W: You really can't isolate or identify in any one category the relations of the Department of Defense with Congress because you're dealing with too many different things. Obviously each of the Services has relations with Congress, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense does. And these are very delicate, very close, and very constant relations. I'd say that by-and-large we get along pretty well with Congress, considering that we're spending so much of the total federal budget and considering the fact--which we do--that this will affect so closely both the national welfare and also the individual welfare of the particular states. We're spending an awful lot of money. The way in which we spend it has direct impact on the constituents of every member of Congress. So consequently they're never going to be totally happy with what we do. All you can really do I think, as Mr. McNamara put it once, is to try and build up a certain store of good will, recognizing that you're going to draw very heavily on it, and recognizing that at some point you're going to become overdrawn with any individual member of Congress. And that does occur.

One of the continuing problems, of course, is the fact that the members of the Armed Services Committee acquire a degree of expertise and acquire strong opinions on Defense matters. They don't like to see those opinions running contrary to those of the current incumbents in the civilian slots in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. And they're never persuaded that they would not make better Secretaries of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Secretary of Defense than those current incumbents. But I think that it works reasonably satisfactorily.

P: Do you feel it has deteriorated at all over the last few years?

W: No, I'd say that during the last ten-and-a-half months, during Mr. Clifford's

term, that they have improved greatly. But some people would say that they had no way to go except up at that point. But when a Secretary of Defense is in office as long as Mr. McNamara was in office, his relations with Congress are just bound to worsen. During that period of time he becomes overdrawn in the good will account with just about every Senator that there is, because he is bound during that period of time to have done things that have stepped on their particular toes, and Congressional toes are extraordinarily sensitive.

Now Mr. Clifford, I think, has profited both by the fact that he was new and by the fact that he is extraordinarily good at getting along with people. And he has been able to reach accommodations on certain issues that were of major importance to the more powerful members of the Armed Services Committee. He has been able to do so without compromising the overall objectives of the Department of Defense. I would anticipate that Mr. Laird, because first of all he comes from Congress himself and is familiar with the way they operate--the way in which they think--and also because he too will be new, will be able to get along quite well with Congress for a period of time. I would say that if he stays for seven years that he will be in about the same parlous state with respect to his Congressional relations as Mr. McNamara was at the end of that time. It's a great argument for rapid turnover in Cabinets.

P: You spoke of certain issues in regard to Mr. McNamara's having problems with Congress? What were they?

W: Oh God, I couldn't conceivably go through the inventory. But, you know, there are a variety of chronic things. For example, like the size of the attack submarine fleet, or the extent to which you're going to go for

nuclear propulsion on surface vessels. And then a whole host of things that fortunately belong under the jurisdiction of Assistant Secretaries other than me.

P: Since you're speaking of two Secretaries of Defense and you've served under them both, I'd like to ask you how you would compare these men in terms of style, pace, decision-making relations with their staff and the Services.

W: I would say that the similarities far exceeded the differences; that, in the first place, both of them have been prodigious workers. I don't think that it would be easy to find any two men who have worked as hard as both Mr. McNamara and Mr. Clifford worked. The only two that come to mind immediately are Mr. Vance and Mr. Nitze.

As far as their relations with their staff are concerned, in both instances they were men with a talent for human relations. They had an ability to draw, I think, the devotion and the dedication from their subordinates; and had an awareness of people as people.

There's a great difference in style. Mr. Clifford is a much more deliberate man insofar as his manner of speech and his manner of approach is concerned. I think oddly enough, and quite contrary to the public image, that Mr. McNamara had a tendency to shoot from the hip to a greater extent than Mr. Clifford. He was more apt to reach a decision on a spot basis and on the basis perhaps of less information.

But the basic similarity is that they are both great human beings, men of extraordinary intelligency, extraordinary comprehension--and that both have served their country, I think, superbly.

P: Have you had any changes in this particular office with the changeover in Secretaries?

W: No. I would say that the basic work of the office has continued pretty much without change. There are, of course, certain differences in the demands that any Secretary places on any part of his total empire. In the case of Mr. Clifford, one thing that we've had, of course, is the fact that he has had a morning staff meeting every morning at which I was one of the participants. So as a consequence that has changed my daily schedule--And also the fact that there has to be preparation for that.

P: Every morning?

W: Yes, every morning. This has made some change in the operation of ISA, wouldn't you say, John?

John: Yes.

W: But that's the principal difference.

John: Yes, sir, I think so. And of course the gap was filled by the presence of Mr. Earle to pick up a lot of things which you could no longer_____.

W: That's right.

P: Would you repeat that? That won't be on the tape.

W: Well, what Colonel Conlee [Lt. Col. John Conlee, U.S. Army, Assistant Executive Officer to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA)] has brought up--and it is a fact--is that because of the fact that every morning for about an hour-and-a-half I sit down with Mr. Clifford, this means that a lot of the functions that I would have performed during that period of time have been performed by my principal deputy, Mr. [Ralph] Earle [II].

P: Mr. Warnke, how much do you think that our commitment in Viet Nam has

affected this Administration in terms of reputation and popularity both here and abroad?

W: That's an awfully difficult question. I would say that it has affected it very dramatically, and very adversely; that there's no question in my mind of the fact that it brought about the premature retirement of President Johnson from public life; that were it not for Viet Nam he would have run for re-election and been re-elected. So in that sense, it not only affected the Administration, it changed the Administration!

As far as world opinion is concerned, I think that the impact has been far less dramatic. After all, we're quite a responsive democracy, so as a consequence changes in American public opinion bring about direct political change. Changes in world opinion do not bring about that kind of dramatic change politically in the United States. We've been able to withstand unpopularity abroad over a period of our total history.

What it has done, I think, is to bring about certain changes in the reactions of our allies. I would say, for example, that it did have for a period of time somewhat of an adverse effect on NATO, because the Danes, for example, found our Viet Nam effort to be unpalatable--and because of the fact that there was great criticism within some of the other NATO countries about America's participation in Viet Nam and accordingly, some resistance to the continued participation of these countries in NATO.

Those pressures, however, did not have any lasting effect for two reasons. First of all, the Russian's misbehavior, and the fact that NATO became more important to its participants. And secondly, the decision of the President to cut down the bombing drastically in March of last

year. That took an awful lot of the public opprobrium away from our Viet Nam effort.

So that I would say that the principal impact has been a domestic one; and what it did is really put a premature end to the career of President Johnson.

P: I don't think I've asked you what your activities were in the assessment of the Middle East crisis as being a particular crisis situation that erupted furing your tenure. Could I have your views on that?

W: My views as to what my participation was.

P: Your activities, and your assessment of it.

W: Well, ISA, of course, acted as the principal adviser to the Secretary of Defense during the June 1967 crisis. I can't say what my own reactions were because that was two months before I took office. I was General Counsel at that point.

P: I knew there was a reason for not asking it.

W: I did, however, participate on certain task forces as General Counsel at the request of Mr. McNamara. I worked with McGeorge Bundy during the brief period of time that he was down here helping the President's evaluation of the crisis.

P: What was your view of the sinking of the [U.S.S.] "Liberty"?

W: Obviously, it was the kind of inexplicable and indefensible action that occurs in wars. I found it hard to believe that it was, in fact, an honest mistake on the part of the Israeli air force units. I still find it impossible to believe that it was. I suspect that in the heat of battle they figured that the presence of this American ship was inimical to their interests, and that somebody without

authorization attacked it. It's a reason why you should try and avoid wars.

I'm afraid that we're going to have to terminate this now.

P: Could I ask you a final question?

W: Yes.

P: Have you been interviewed by any other historic group, another Presidential history program, or anything along that line?

W: No. You've got an exclusive on this, Miss ierce.

P: In any sort of public statements that you've been quoted, do you have any changes or corrections or additions?

W: I can't think of any now. I think that I can say safely that I had read all of my speeches before I delivered them, and as a result they were consistent with my views.

P: The only thing I haven't asked you about is your activity surrounding the transition of government. Do you have a moment to answer that? That's my final question.

W: Well, of course, neither Mr. Laird nor Mr. Packard has been able to spend a tremendous amount of time over here. I have had the opportunity to talk with both of them to give them my views as to the functioning of the operation; and I have undertaken to spend the next ten days at this job. And I will endeavor during that time to ease the transition to the extent that I can.

P: Do you have any further comments?

W: I have no further comments.

P: Thank you very much.

W: Thank you very much, Miss Pierce.

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By Paul C. Warnke

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